



Suicide Prevention

PA Department of Corrections

If you have any information regarding an individual making statements relating to suicide or presenting the below signs or symptoms of suicide, you are urged to contact the relevant state correctional institution immediately.

Potential Signs and Symptoms of an Individual who may be considering Suicide or Self-Harm

Suicidal Plan

The potential for suicide is greater when there is a well-organized and detailed plan developed by the individual. The potential also increases when the means of the suicide identified in the plan is readily available to the individual and can be lethal.

Stress

The potential for suicide is greater if the individual is subject to stress from increased pressures such as, but not limited to:

- ▶ difficulties in coping with legal problems;
- ▶ the loss of a loved one through death or divorce;
- ▶ the loss of valued employment (high paying position in Correctional Industries [CI]);
- ▶ anniversary of incarceration date or offense;
- ▶ serious illnesses or diagnosis of terminal illness;
- ▶ threats or perceived threats from peers;
- ▶ sexual victimization, particularly after the first submission;
- ▶ unexpected punishment (additional sentence or parole denial);
- ▶ recent transfer from another state or county facility;
- ▶ recently returned to prison due to a parole violation;
- ▶ long sentence coupled with poor external supports (family or volunteers) and/or minimal involvement in facility supports (education, treatment, activities, and employment);
- ▶ somatic complaints of a vague nature that do not respond to treatment;
- ▶ history of violence toward others;
- ▶ requesting protective custody;
- ▶ deemed to be a “high profile” case;
- ▶ long sentence, including life;
- ▶ history of alcohol and/or drug abuse; and/or
- ▶ The potential for suicide is greater if a parent, spouse, or other close relative has attempted or committed suicide.

Symptoms

The potential for suicide is greater if the individual manifests such symptoms such as:

- ▶ auditory and/or visual hallucinations, particularly command hallucinations ordering the person to harm himself/herself;
- ▶ delusions;
- ▶ any change from the individual's sleep pattern (this may be manifested by either a decrease or increase in sleep);
- ▶ any change from the individual's ordinary eating pattern. (This may be manifested by either a decrease or an increase in the individual's appetite with an accompanied decrease or increase in weight);
- ▶ social withdrawal;
- ▶ apathy;
- ▶ despondency;
- ▶ severe feelings of hopelessness and helplessness;
- ▶ general attitude of physical and emotional exhaustion;
- ▶ agitation through such symptoms as tension, guilt, shame, poor impulse control or feelings of rage, anger, hostility, or revenge;
- ▶ giving away personal property;
- ▶ removal of every visitor from the visiting list;
- ▶ changing next of kin notifications;
- ▶ expressions of death or finality (i.e. "it will all be better tomorrow" or "the world is better off without me");
- ▶ frequent engagements in self-injurious behaviors and/or serious suicide attempts;
- ▶ sudden elevated mood ("everything's OK attitude"); and/or
- ▶ psychic or somatic anxiety.

Personal Resources

The potential for suicide is greater if the person has no family or friends, or his/her family and friends are unwilling to help. Potential is greater if a significant other evidences a defensive, rejecting, punishing attitude, or denies that the individual needs help.

Acute vs. Chronic Aspects

The potential for suicide is greater when there is a sudden onset of specific symptoms. An individual who has recently learned that he/she has a serious disorder is at greater risk than a person who has been coping with the problem for years. The acute risk is higher if the person appears anxious.

Medical Status

The potential for suicide is greater when there is a chronic, debilitating illness, especially when it involves an alteration of body image or life style.

FINAL NOTE

A person considering suicide does not demonstrate all of these signals. Generally, the more characteristics the individual has, the greater the potential for self-destruction. Every suicide attempt, including gestures, should be taken seriously.